

37 Interactive Techniques

Adapted in part from:

Thomas A. Angelo/K. Patricia Cross, *Classroom Assessment Techniques*.
2nd Edition. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 1993.

Alison Morrison-Shetlar/Mary Marwitz, *Teaching Creatively: Ideas in Action*. Outernet: Eden Prairie, 2001.

Silberman, Mel. *Active Learning: 101 Strategies to Teach Any Subject*.
Allyn and Bacon: Boston, 1996.

VanGundy, Arthur. *101 Activities for Teaching Creativity and Problem Solving*. Pfeiffer: San Francisco, 2005.

By using these techniques you can easily and quickly assess if students have really mastered the material and plan to dedicate more time to it, if necessary. The process of measuring student understanding is also practice for the material—often students do not actually learn the material until asked to make use of it in assessments such as these. In addition, the very nature of these assessments drives interactivity. These techniques are often perceived as “fun”, yet they are frequently more effective than lectures at enabling student learning. Not all techniques listed here will have universal appeal, with factors such as your teaching style and personality influencing which choices may be right for you.

1. **Picture Prompt** – Show students an image with no explanation, and ask them to identify/explain it, and justify their answers. Or ask students to write about it using terms from lecture, or to name the processes and concepts shown. Also works well as group activity. Do not give the “answer” until they have explored all options first.
2. **Think Break** – Ask a rhetorical question, and then allow 20 seconds for students to think about the problem before you go on to explain. This technique encourages students to take part in the problem-solving process even when discussion isn't feasible. Having students write something down (while you write an answer also) helps assure that they will in fact work on the problem.
3. **Pass the Chalk** – Provide chalk or a soft toy; whoever has it must answer your next question, and they pass it on to the student of their choice.
4. **Town Hall Meeting** – Abdicate the front of the room for a student willing to speak out on a subject, and when she is done with her comment, she selects the next speaker from the hands raised.
5. **The Half Class Lecture** – Divide the class in half and provide reading material to one half. Lecture on that same material to the other half of the class. Then, switch the groups and repeat, ending with a recap by pairing up members of opposite groups.
6. **Tournament** – Divide the class into at least two groups and announce a competition for most points on a practice test. Let them study a topic together and then give that quiz, tallying points. After each round, let them study the next topic before quizzing

again. The points should be carried over from round to round. The student impulse for competition will focus their engagement onto the material itself.

7. **One-Minute Papers** – Students write for one minute on a specific question (which might be generalized to “what was the most important thing you learned today”). Best used at the end of the class session.
8. **Muddiest Point** – Like the Minute Paper, but asks for the “most confusing” point instead. Best used at the end of the class session.
9. **White board rotation** – Various questions are posted on whiteboards which are located around the room. Students rotate around the class in small groups and write their answers on each board finishing with a class discussion on their answers
10. **Drawing for Understanding** – Students illustrate an abstract concept or idea. Comparing drawings around the room can clear up misconceptions.
11. **What’s the Principle** – After recognizing the problem, students assess what principle to apply in order to solve it. Helps focus on problem TYPES rather than individual specific problems. Principle(s) should be listed out.
12. **Haiku** – Students write a haiku (a three-line poem: 5-syllables, then 7, then 5) on a given topic or concept, and then share it with others.
13. **Bookmark Notes** - Distribute full-length paper to be used as a bookmark for the current chapter. On it, record prompts and other “reading questions”, and require students to record their notes, observations, and objections while reading onto these bookmarks for collection and discussion in class.
14. **True or False?** – Distribute index cards (one to each student) on which is written a statement. Half of the cards will contain statements that are true, half false. Students decide if theirs is one of the true statements or not, using whatever means they desire. Variation: designate half the room a space for those who think their statements are true, and the other half for false.
15. **“Real-World”** – Have students discuss in class how a topic or concept relates to a real-world application or product. Then have students write about this topic for homework.
16. **Concept Mapping** – Students write keywords onto sticky notes and then organize them into a flowchart. Could be less structured by having students simply draw the connections they make between concepts.

17. **Advice Letter** – Students write a letter of advice to future students on how to be successful students in that course.
18. **Tabloid Titles** – Ask students to write a tabloid-style headline that would illustrate the concept currently being discussed. Share and choose the best.
19. **Bumper Stickers** – Ask students to write a slogan-like bumper sticker to illustrate a particular concept from lecture. Variation: can be used to ask them to sum up the entire course in one sentence.
20. **Movie Application** – In groups, students discuss examples of movies that made use of a concept or event discussed in class, trying to identify at least one way the movie-makers got it right, and one way they got it wrong.
21. **Student Pictures** – Ask students to bring their own pictures from home to illustrate a specific concept to their working groups.
22. **Definitions and Applications** – In groups, students provide definitions, associations, and applications of concepts discussed in lecture.
23. **TV Commercial** – In groups, students create a 30-second TV commercial for the subject currently being discussed in class. Variation: ask them to act out their commercials.
24. **Six Degrees of “RNA Transcription Errors”** – Like the parlor game “Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon” (in which actors are linked by joint projects), you provide groups with a conceptual start point and challenge them to leap to a given concept in six moves or fewer. One student judge in each group determines if each leap is fair and records the nature of the leaps for reporting back to the class.
25. **Applications to major** – During last 15 minutes of class, ask students to write a short explanation about how the point applies to their major.
26. **Empty Outline**- Distribute a partially completed outline of today’s lecture and ask students to fill it in. Use at start or at the end of class.
27. **Background Knowledge Probe**- Use questionnaire (multiple choice or short answer) when introducing a new topic.
28. **Think-Pair-Share**- Students share and compare possible answers to a question with a partner before addressing the larger class.

29. **Jigsaw-** Give each group a different topic to discuss. Then, re-mix the groups so there is one planted “expert” on each topic who needs to tell the new group what was discussed in their previous group.
30. **Pick the winner-** Divide the class into groups and have all groups work on the same problem while recording their answer/strategy on paper. Have the groups switch with a nearby group and evaluate their answer. After a few minutes, allow each set of groups to merge and ask them to select the better answer from the two choices, which will be presented to the class as a whole.
31. **Lecture Reaction-** Divide the class into four groups after a lecture: questioners (must ask two questions about the related material), example givers (provide applications), divergent thinkers (must disagree with some points of the lecture), and agreeers (explain which points they agreed with or found helpful). After discussion, brief the whole class.
32. **Find the company-** Students search the internet for a corporation that makes use of the concepts/ideas from class, and must defend their choice in the next class session.
33. **Impromptu Speeches-** Students generate key words, drop them into a hat, and self-choose presenters to speak for 30 seconds on each topic.
34. **Question and answer cards-** Make index cards for every student in the class; half with questions about class content; half with the right answers. Shuffle the cards and have students find their appropriate partner by comparing questions and answers on their own cards.
35. **Wisdom of another-** After any individual brainstorm or creative activity, partner students up to share their results. Then, call for volunteers of students who found their partner’s work to be interesting or exemplary. Students are sometimes more willing to share in plenary the work of fellow students than their own work.
36. **Course-Relate Self-Confidence Surveys-** Simple questions that measure how self-confident students are when it comes to a specific skill. Once they become aware they can (or can’t) do it, they focus on it more.
37. **Word Journal-** First, Summarize the entire topic on paper with a single word. Then use a paragraph to explain your word choice.

April 3rd

Interactive Techniques

Town Hall Meeting – Abdicate the front of the room for a student willing to speak out on a controversial subject, and when she is done with her comment, she selects the next speaker from the hands raised.

The Half Class Lecture – Divide the class in half and provide reading material to one half. Lecture on that same material to the other half of the class. Then, switch the groups and repeat, ending with a recap by pairing up members of opposite groups.

Tournament – Divide the class into at least two groups and announce a competition for most points on a practice test. Let them study a topic together and then give that quiz, tallying points. After each round, let them study the next topic before quizzing again. The points should be carried over from round to round. The student impulse for competition will focus their engagement onto the material itself.

Drawing for Understanding – Students illustrate an abstract concept or idea. Comparing drawings around the room can clear up misconceptions.

Haiku – Students write a haiku (a three-line poem: 5-syllables, then 7, then 5) on a given topic or concept, and then share it with others.

Bumper Stickers – Ask students to write a slogan-like bumper sticker to illustrate a particular concept from lecture. Variation: can be used to ask them to sum up the entire course in one sentence.

Jigsaw (Group Experts) – Give each group a different topic. Re-mix groups with one planted “expert” on each topic, who now has to teach his new group.

Human Tableau or Class Modeling – Groups create living scenes (also of inanimate objects) which relate to the classroom concepts or discussions.

Simulation – Place the class into a long-term simulation (like as a business) to enable Problem-Based Learning (PBL).

Audio and Videotaped Protocols – Taping students while they are solving problems assesses the learner’s awareness of his own thinking.

Imaginary Show and Tell – Students pretend they have brought an object relevant to current discussion, and “display” it to the class while talking about its properties.

Six Degrees of “RNA Transcription Errors” – Like the parlor game “Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon” (in which actors are linked by joint projects), you provide groups with a conceptual start point and challenge them to leap to a given concept in six moves or fewer. One student judge in each group determines if each leap is fair and records the nature of the leaps for reporting back to the class.

Replace Discussion Boards - Create a Facebook “group” (private/invite only) and use the Wall as the class discussion board. Students are notified by home page notification when someone replies to their thread.

Notify Students Quickly (facebook) - Message all members of your Facebook group with one click; this will reach your students much faster than an email, because most of them check Facebook regularly.

Report from the Field (Twitter) – Students use smart phones to record their observations while witnessing an event/location related to the course of study, capturing more honest and spontaneous reactions.

Follow an Expert (Twitter) – Luminaries in many disciplines, as well as companies and governmental agencies, often publish a Twitter feed. Reading such updates provides a way to stay current.